

## **TOWN COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

Title: Mammoth Lakes Wildfire Team Program Update.

Meeting Date: March 19, 2025

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

This is an information item only; no action is required.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Recent events in Los Angeles have further highlighted the need to expand efforts within Mammoth Lakes to increase our wildfire resilience, harden individual homes, and provide education related to wildfire prevention. Similarly, the Town has recently adopted the California Joint Strategy for Sustainable Outdoor Recreation and Wildfire Resilience to serve as a guiding document for further efforts in this space.

As such, Town has begun standing up the Mammoth Lakes Wildfire Team, a partner effort between the Town of Mammoth Lakes (TOML), Mammoth Lakes Fire Department (MLFD), Whitebark Institute, Mammoth Disposal, and the Mammoth Community Water District (MCWD). TOML anticipates more partner participation as the Team's goals, objectives, and schedules of work are further thought out and established.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The primary emphasis of the Mammoth Lakes Wildfire Team will be to perform meaningful fire mitigation efforts at the parcel level to increase the overall fire resiliency of the Town, with a focus on the following goals and objectives:

- Parcel Level Evaluations
- Parcel Level On-The-Ground Work
- Supporting Resiliency Through the Building Code
- Software Support
- Public Outreach
- Funding Opportunities

The Wildfire Team feels this multi-faceted approach will allow for this effort to address a wide range of topics within the Wildfire prevention space with the hope of creating a long-term culture of fire mitigation efforts and overall awareness within the community.

With partner support, the Team seeks to evaluate every parcel within the community in the next 2-3 years. Each property would be evaluated and provided with the steps needed to increase resiliency at the parcel level. Evaluations would occur from the street unless the

property owner invited the evaluation team onto their property. These evaluations will be the first step in determining the level of effort needed to ensure hardening of individual properties and the on-the-ground work needed to accomplish those goals.

Following the goal related to parcel inventories, property owners will have the option to complete the work on their own, or through various landscaping or property management companies. In order to incentivize and bolster these efforts, the Team will also host ‘neighborhood level’ events to provide further support for resilience undertakings. Dumpsters will be provided at the neighborhood level allowing for easy disposal of green waste along with support from Town staff and the MLFD Wildfire Team. Prioritization of parcels will be determined using the Residential Hazard Zones established in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

Other aspects of the program will occur at the regulatory level through examinations of the building code, and how any changes to that code could help to increase the Town’s ability to mitigate catastrophic wildfire. Currently, the Wildfire Team feels that “carrots are better than sticks” in terms of compliance, but looking at ways to increase community resilience is prudent, nonetheless. The Team will continue to monitor ways in which the building/municipal codes can be used to further harden the community, while also looking into steps other communities have taken in this space.

Utilization of technology to support community resilience is another prudent measure the Wildfire Team would like to undertake to further reinforce our efforts. Software such as Fireside and Vibrant Planet offer outstanding resources to determine overall risk, which can update in real time. It also provides support related to home evaluations and the status of individual parcels in terms of defensible space, information related to ember cast, and other relevant information. This will allow TOML to not only begin the process of creating a comprehensive database but will also provide essential data for seeking grants and other funding opportunities.

In order to ensure homeowners and residents are aware of these efforts, public outreach and education will be another primary focus of the Wildfire Team. We seek to directly engage homeowners, condo owners, and HOAs on the goals and objectives of the team and how to accomplish them in a safe and efficient manner. In order to reach every resident and homeowner, the Team proposes to send out mailers highlighting the efforts of the Mammoth Lakes Wildfire Team, its goals and objectives, along with next steps. To provide further education and support, How-To videos related to fire mitigation themes will be developed and shared on TOML websites and social media platforms, with the hope of leveraging the reach of our partners to expand the messaging further. We also see a role for landscaping and homeowner service companies in this space, to help support the individual efforts of homeowners. Lastly, educational materials on home hardening and community resiliency efforts will be distributed. The Wildfire Team will ensure investigations into efforts already occurring in this space to ensure the consistency of both the messaging and collateral materials.

Funding opportunities will be another focus of the Wildfire Team as we constantly desire to find alternative funding sources to support this essential work. Leveraging our existing grant contractor, California Consulting, along with staying up to date on funding opportunities will allow the Wildfire Team to ensure the long-term success of the program.

Lastly, the goals and objectives of the Team are based on a commonsense approach, current best practices in the Community Resiliency space, and programs already being successfully undertaken in communities such as Truckee, CA. The Team will constantly evaluate our processes and procedures while simultaneously staying abreast of the actions being taken by other communities facing similar issues in the Wildland Urban Interface.

### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter budget review, \$50,000 has been recommended to support the implementation of this plan. Budgets related to the Mammoth Lakes Wildfire Team are currently being developed and will be presented to the Town Council for approval if there are additional financial needs. Relevant grants related to home hardening, education, and general wildfire resilience will be pursued with the goal of providing supplemental program funding.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

NEPA/CEQA will be performed for any Wildfire work that creates ground disturbance or could have impacts on Wildlife, Botany, Hydrological, or Archeological resources.